

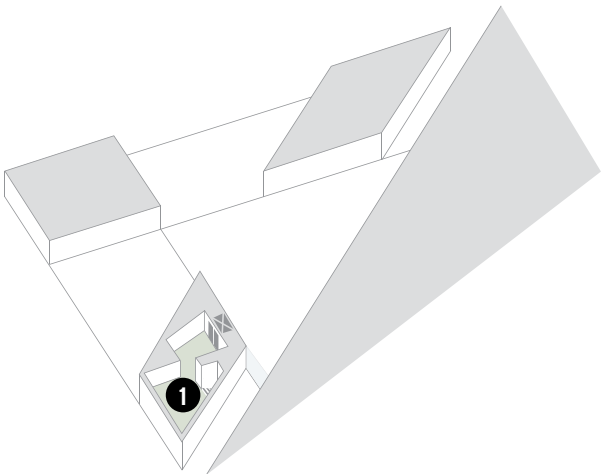
Less than an hour? East Building

Short notes for a short trip through the National Gallery’s East Building, dedicated to the art of our time.

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National Gallery of Art, East Building



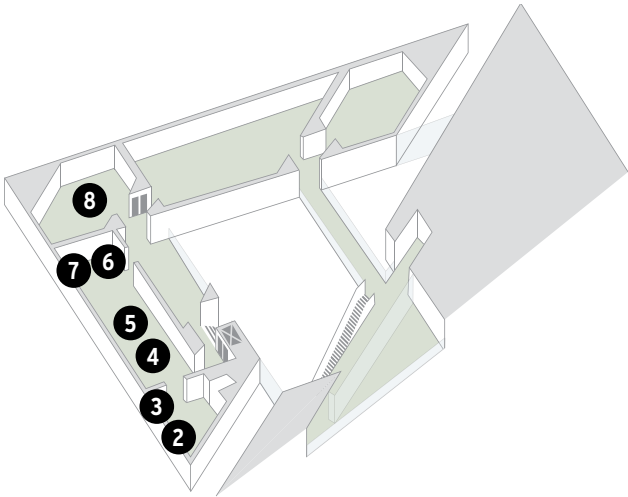
Tower Matisse Cutouts
on view 10:00-2:00, Mon-Sat; 11:00-3:00, Sun



detail

1 Henri Matisse Cutouts
1952/1953

Matisse’s final artistic triumph was “cutting into color.” He conducted rhythmic color symphonies by “drawing with scissors,” then composing, recutting, and combining the resulting shapes. “It’s like a dance,” he said.



Upper Level Early Twentieth Century



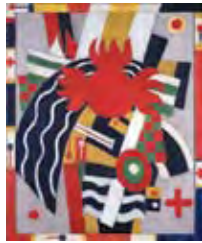
2 Pablo Picasso
Family of Saltimbanques, 1905

Picasso may be the harlequin figure (left) in this image of an itinerant circus troupe that often performed near his bohemian Parisian neighborhood of Montmartre. Young, poor, and transient himself, Picasso identified with these street artists. Their stark back-drop and disconnected gazes underscore the loneliness and marginality the artist keenly felt.



5 Constantin Brancusi
Bird in Space, 1927

The form of *Bird in Space* is simplified and abstracted to its purest essentials, becoming the physical embodiment of the artist’s famous statement: “I do not sculpt birds, but flights.”



8 Marsden Hartley
The Aero, 1914

The boldly colored shapes and forms of *The Aero* are abstracted from German military uniform emblems and regimental flags. It is an homage to the death of a young German officer whom Hartley loved and the military spectacle the artist witnessed in Berlin during preparations for World War I.



3 Pablo Picasso
Head of a Woman (Fernande), model 1909, cast before 1932

The head of Fernande is often referred to as the first cubist sculpture. The downward-turning head and inward-turning affect of the work also make it a portrayal of introspection, perhaps melancholy.



6 Georgia O’Keeffe
Jack-in-the-Pulpit No. IV, 1930

In a series of six paintings, O’Keeffe progressively simplified and magnified this flower’s form. Here a brilliant white line draws us to its interior. “Nobody sees a flower, really....We haven’t the time, and to see takes time....,” she said.



4 Piet Mondrian
Tableau No. IV; Lozenge Composition with Red, Gray, Blue, Yellow, and Black, c. 1924/1925

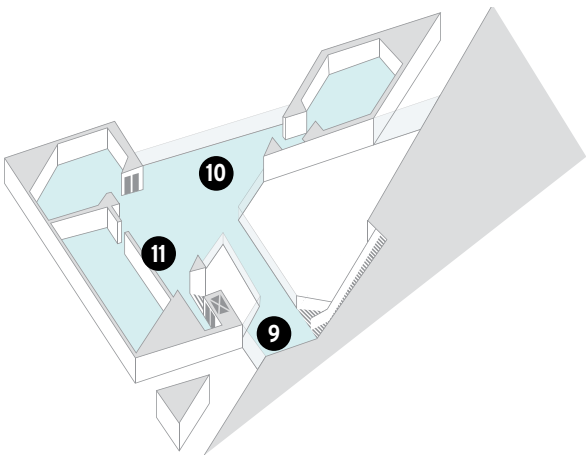
Mondrian subverts the convention of a painting as a rectangular window by tilting it diagonally and emptying the center of color. The focus becomes the dynamic relationships among the geometric shaped and painted forms, which appear “cut out” from an infinite pattern.



7 Arshile Gorky
The Artist and His Mother, c. 1926-c. 1942

Gorky never recovered from losing his mother and his homeland in the Armenian genocide of World War I. This portrait – based on a 1912 studio photograph taken before their forced exile and her death – captures Gorky’s grief and love in its tender palette, amorphous setting, and unwavering stares.

Note: Works may be temporarily off view.



Mezzanine



9 Martin Puryear
Lever No. 3, 1989

Lever’s gentle form and beautiful surface epitomize Puryear’s love of nature and hand-wrought objects. Pine wood, stacked, carved, smoothed, and painted, evokes ancient artistic practices Puryear learned in West Africa, Sweden, and the Arctic—among them the traditions of hand carving and dyeing materials.



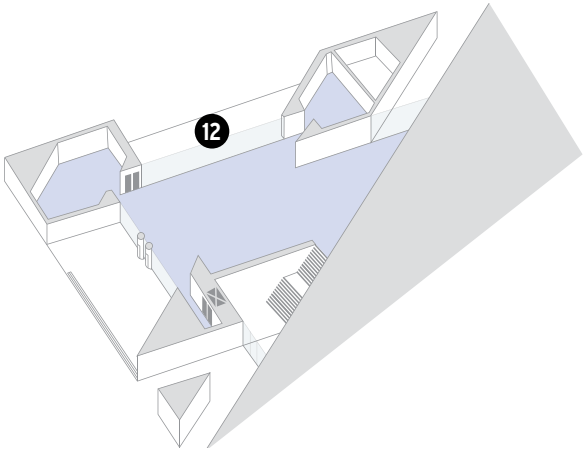
10 Tony Smith
Die, model 1962, fabricated 1968

Smith telephoned the Industrial Welding Company with instructions for fabricating *Die*, whose deceptively simple title alludes to casting, to chance, and ultimately, to death. “Six foot box. Six foot under,” Smith remarked.



11 Rachel Whiteread
Ghost, 1990

To “mummify air,” Whiteread created a negative plaster cast of a Victorian parlor interior. Windows, doors, soot-streaked fireplace, tile grids, molding, and light switch all appear in reverse. This ghostly structure conjures memory and time, absence and presence, life and death.

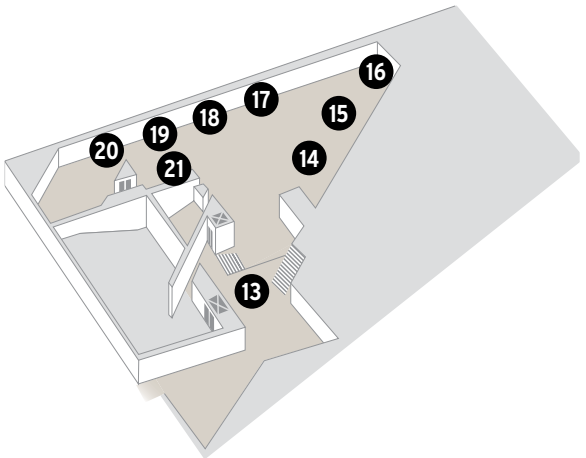


Ground Level



12 Andy Goldsworthy
Roof, 2004–2005

Created for this site, *Roof* consists of nine hollow domes of stacked slate. The view from above (Mezzanine) reveals a rippling configuration and velvet black holes. “I am drawn to holes,” Goldsworthy said, “with the same urge I have to look over a cliff edge.”



Concourse Art since 1950



13 Richard Serra
Five Plates, Two Poles, 1971

Like a house of cards, this “plate-and-pole” work seems intimidatingly precarious, yet also in perfect balance. Move around it to shift your experience of its weight, mass, and gravity.



14 Louise Bourgeois
Spring, 1949

After emigrating from Paris to New York, Bourgeois carved standing sculptures she called “personages.” The artist believed they invoked “badly missed presences” and thus preferred to see them displayed in groups. *Spring*—with its totemic, tapering stem and rounded, budlike forms—may evoke something lost, or perhaps something new.



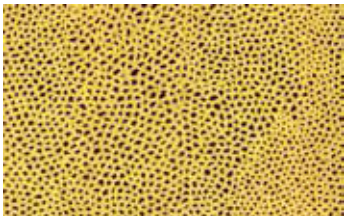
15 Jackson Pollock *(detail)*
Number 1, 1950 (Lavender Mist)

Trace the arcs of black, white, russet, silver, and blue to understand this work’s delicate, layered composition. Laying canvas on the floor of his Long Island studio, Pollock dripped and poured paint on it, “signing” it with handprints (upper left corner and top).



16 Alexander Calder Gallery
1920s–1970s

This room is a microcosm of Calder’s career. Trained as an engineer, he blended playfulness, delicacy, and exactitude in sculptures that move with air currents, summon nature, and perfectly pivot color, shape, and balance.



17 Yayoi Kusama *(detail)*
Infinity Nets Yellow, 1960

Kusama’s painting is from her best-known series. It has been obsessively worked from edge to edge with repeated interlocking yellow motifs laid over a brown ground, as though a “thousand spiders had worked together for months to cover a field with their lace.”



18 Roy Lichtenstein *(detail)*
Look Mickey, 1961

The irascible Donald Duck, thrilled to have caught a fish, will sputter when he learns—as Mickey Mouse can see—that he has hooked his own tail. This cartoon rip-off, pitting a gag against the lofty subjects of painting, is a prime example of pop art.



19 Robert Mangold
Yellow Wall (Section I + II), 1964

Mangold’s painted construction consists of notched plywood panels whose distinctive cutouts allude to openings for windows and doors in actual walls. “I liked the idea of a section of something implying more and yet being a complete thing,” he said.



20 Jasper Johns
Perilous Night, 1982

Johns’ art brims with references—the nailed-up hatchwork image and cast body parts, to his earlier work; handkerchief and “wood,” to Picasso and cubism; primary colors and maulstick, to the act of painting. John Cage’s musical score, source of the work’s title, suggests other covert allusions.



21 Sol LeWitt *(detail)*
Wall Drawing #65..., 1971

If this work of crayon-color lines invokes childhood prohibitions against scribbling on the wall, consult the label. Its brisk directive signals the artist’s aim: to set in motion an idea, the execution of which (by assistants) leaves little to conception and much to chance.